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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000, requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Similar mandates were also contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69, 52/100 and 53/120. The present report emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of gender mainstreaming and follow-up activities, including activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations, since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.6/2000/2).

The report on the joint work plan for the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is being submitted as a separate report.

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I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6, on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women, in particular the items to be included in the agenda of the Commission. With regard to documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, inter alia, that under item 3 (a) of the agenda of the Commission, a review by the Secretary-General of mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. In its resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Similar mandates were contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69, 52/100 and 53/120.

3. In each of the three reports submitted in the course of a year, the information that is most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body is provided. The report to the Commission on the Status of Women emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of gender mainstreaming and follow-up activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The report to the Economic and Social Council focuses on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. The report to the General Assembly contains information from all entities of the United Nations system, including specialized agencies and international financial institutions, and an analysis of activities undertaken at the national level and by NGOs and other actors of civil society.

4. Section II of the present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 55/71. Section III responds to resolution 2000/23 of the Economic and Social Council on Palestinian women and to resolution 43/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned. The report of the Secretary-General on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan submitted in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/9 is before the Commission as an addendum to the present report (E/CN.6/2001/2/Add.1).

II. Progress in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system

A. The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council

1. Fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly

5. The report of the Secretary-General (A/55/341) on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", also known as Beijing+5, provided an overview of the provisions and recommendations for action contained in the "Political declaration" and "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (resolutions S-23/2 and 3, respectively). Those instruments focus on areas where the Platform for Action has been strengthened and reinforced, on implementation measures at the national and international levels by Governments, the United Nations, NGOs and other actors. They also focus on recommendations that have immediate implications for action at the international level, including those for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

6. In its resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000, the General Assembly, welcoming the outcome of its twenty-third special session (ibid.) and stressing the importance of strong, sustained political will and commitment at the national, regional and international levels in order to achieve full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and outcome of that special session, reaffirmed that the United Nations system should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective, including through the work of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and through the maintenance of gender units and focal points in order to ensure the effective implementation of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the Assembly.

7. In the same resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the primary role of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women in the overall policy-making, follow-up and coordination of the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The Council was invited to continue to promote a coordinated and integrated follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits and their reviews, and requested the Council further to intensify its efforts to ensure that gender mainstreaming is an integral part of all its activities concerning the follow-up.

8. The Council was also invited to continue to further policy coordination and inter-agency cooperation towards the achievement of the objectives of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

9. The Assembly reaffirmed the central role of the Commission on the Status of Women in assisting the Economic and Social Council in monitoring, assessing progress made and accelerating the implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly within the United Nations system, and in advising the Council thereon. In this respect, the Assembly noted that at its forty-fifth session in 2001, the Commission on the Status of Women would develop a new multi-year programme of work, and in this respect requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission with recommendations for the effective implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including through enhancing the effectiveness of its work and its catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities.

10. The Assembly recognized the importance attached to the regional and subregional monitoring of the global and regional platforms for action and the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly by regional commissions. In this respect, the Assembly called for the promotion of further cooperation among Governments and, where appropriate, national machineries of the same region. The Assembly also reaffirmed the need for mobilization of adequate resources at all levels, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition in order to implement the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

2. Economic and Social Council, substantive session of 2000

11. In its decision 1999/281 of 30 July 1999, the Economic and Social Council decided that the theme for the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2000 would be "Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy". Consideration of this topic provided the Council with an opportunity to show that information communication technologies were central to the creation of a knowledge-based economy and society and that they could play an important role in accelerating growth, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, particularly in facilitating their beneficial integration into the global economy.

12. For the first time, during its substantive session of 2000, the Council undertook a comprehensive assessment of conference review processes. At its coordination segment, the Council assessed progress made within the United Nations system, through the conference reviews, in promotion of an integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields. Based on an examination of lessons learned from the five-year reviews of conferences conducted to date, the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/57) on the issue makes a number of proposals to assist the Economic and Social Council in its guidance to its subsidiary bodies with respect to the upcoming 10-year reviews of the conferences of the 1990s as well as in further enhancing its work on conference follow-up. The report also discusses the progress in implementing the conferences in a more integrated and coordinated manner at the national and international levels and makes a number of suggestions to ensure that the United Nations system provides enhanced support in this regard.

13. The report draws attention to overlapping consideration of cross-cutting issues and conference goals and points out that gender perspectives have not been consistently mainstreamed in the five-year

reviews despite guidance on the topic in agreed conclusions 1997/2. However, the Council's efforts to support a more integrated and coordinated follow-up could reinforce the cross-cutting nature of the recent five-year reviews, including the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and ensure the full incorporation of that outcome in follow-up activities of all organizations of the United Nations system (A/55/341, para. 35).

14. During the substantive session of 2000, the Council adopted a number of resolutions, agreed conclusions and decisions. The Council specifically addressed its subsidiary bodies, including functional commissions, in the agreed conclusions and resolutions and called on them to take necessary measures to implement the policy recommendations in their work and, where appropriate, communicate to the Council any specific follow-up actions.

15. In its agreed conclusions 2000/2 of 27 July 2000, on the integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences, the Council invited its relevant functional commissions to consider a number of options listed in paragraph 33 of the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/57) for enhancing the reviews of the major United Nations conferences and summits and to inform the Council for its consideration at its substantive session in 2001 of the outcome of their discussion. The Council suggested that particular attention should be given to the periodicity of the conference reviews. The Council also recommended that functional commissions, in reviewing their options, should consider ways and means of ensuring their capacity to conduct follow-up of conference implementation.

16. The Council also adopted, on 28 July 2000, resolution 2000/26, entitled "The role of employment and work in poverty eradication: empowerment and advancement of women". The Council noted with concern the persistent problems in addressing the challenges of poverty eradication, gender inequalities, empowerment and advancement of women and employment, as reflected in the outcome documents of the recent five-year reviews of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development.

17. The Council therefore strongly encouraged Governments to pursue and strengthen their efforts to work towards achieving the goals of poverty eradication and reiterated the call for the relevant organizations of the United Nations system and the international community to take consistent, coherent, coordinated and joint action in support of national efforts to eradicate poverty, with particular attention to employment creation and work and the empowerment and advancement of women. The Council urged all States that had not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to do so, and also to consider signing and ratifying or acceding to the Optional Protocol.

18. A draft decision on the participation of NGOs not in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development was submitted to the Council for adoption during its substantive session. The Council decided, on an exceptional basis and as an interim measure, to invite those NGOs accredited to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and/or the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly to attend the forty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on Social Development, provided that they had started the process of applying for consultative status in accordance with Council decision 1996/315 of 14 November 1996. The decision was adopted by consensus under the new title "Participation of NGOs in the forty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on Social Development".

B. Activities in support of mainstreaming gender perspectives into the work of the United Nations system

19. The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women has continued systematically to promote, facilitate and monitor the integration of gender perspectives into all areas of the work of the United Nations system, in accordance with the Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming and their subsequent communication by the Secretary-General to heads of all departments, agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions, as well as the renewed mandate

on gender mainstreaming contained in the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow up implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (resolution 55/71 of 4 December 2000). With the additional resource of a Principal Officer on Gender Mainstreaming, it has been possible to strengthen the catalytic and advisory work of the Office of the Special Adviser through initiating more in-depth processes of consultation with senior managers and competence development inputs. The Special Adviser also gave particular attention to the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, including inter-agency collaboration. A summary of such activities is given below.

20. The Special Adviser continued to meet with senior United Nations officials stationed away from New York during their missions to Headquarters, to discuss implementation of the Platform for Action, particularly the mainstreaming strategy, as well as equal opportunities for women and men in the United Nations, including gender balance. During 2000, for example, meetings were held with the Executive Secretaries of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Deputy Executive Secretaries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and ESCAP, the Executive Directors of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan.

21. The Special Adviser also met with senior officials in United Nations entities and held inter-agency meetings with gender focal points and field-based United Nations representatives during visits to Geneva in March and June 2000 and Egypt in October 2000. These meetings allowed for exchange of information on specific steps taken to increase gender mainstreaming, gender balance and a gender-sensitive work environment, as well as on the preparations for or follow-up to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. For example, in conjunction with attendance at the twenty-fourth special session to follow up the World Social Summit at Geneva, a meeting was held with OHCHR on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, follow-up to the special session and the efforts of OHCHR to promote gender mainstreaming. An informal meeting was held with the Geneva-based members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. Other meetings were held with the United Nations Information Service at Geneva, United Nations Office at Geneva, and the Board of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). In conjunction with the Special Adviser's attendance at the First Summit of Arab First Ladies on Current Challenges and Future Prospects, held in Cairo from 18 to 20 November 2000, meetings were held with representatives of the United Nations Egypt Country Team.[1]

22. The Special Adviser continued to meet with the heads of departments and agencies to discuss gender mainstreaming, for example, UNDP, UNICEF, and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Visits were made by the Principal Officer for Gender Mainstreaming in the Office of the Special Adviser to ESCWA in April 2000 and ECE in November 2000. Through a process of consultation with senior managers, concrete recommendations for increasing the incorporation of gender perspectives into work programmes were developed.

23. In its resolution 2000/9, the Economic and Social Council urged the Secretary-General to ensure that a gender perspective is fully incorporated into the work of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and to continue to review the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan and report to the Commission on the Status of Women. The Office of the Special Adviser has remained actively involved in the work of the Afghanistan Support Group and continues to support the work of the Gender Adviser to the United Nations system in Afghanistan.

24. Information and reports prepared by the Gender Adviser on the current situation and its implications for United Nations system activities have been regularly shared with the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. The relevant report of the Secretary-General is before the Commission at the current session (E/CN.6/2001/2/Add.1).

25. Collaboration between the Office of the Special Adviser and the Office of Human Resources Management was established for the development of a

framework for competence development in gender mainstreaming and a resource base of facilitators. The competence development programme for all divisions in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was initiated in October 2000.

26. To promote greater understanding of how gender perspectives could be incorporated into different sectors, briefing notes were prepared by the Office of the Special Adviser in collaboration with various United Nations entities. The briefing notes outline the linkages between gender perspectives and the sector issues, indicate ways and means of bringing attention to gender perspectives and provide resource listings on where to go for more support — publications, guidelines, manuals and web sites. A series of briefing notes has been completed on gender and disarmament within the Department for Disarmament Affairs that are used internally in the department to foster greater awareness, commitment and capacity on gender mainstreaming. Similar series were prepared on macroeconomics, trade, statistics, environment and a number of other individual sectors/issues in the work programmes of the regional commissions.

27. A framework has been developed for assessing progress towards gender mainstreaming, utilizing the concrete guidelines included in the Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2, the letter of the Secretary-General of October 1997 and the outcome of the special session of the Assembly in June 2000. The framework will facilitate more systematic and effective reporting on gender mainstreaming and provide a monitoring tool for the Special Adviser in her efforts to promote and support gender mainstreaming throughout the system.

28. An Inter-Agency Steering Committee for the Special Session, chaired by the Special Adviser, met regularly to ensure coordination and collaboration in preparations for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality were encouraged to make specific contributions to the preparations through producing studies and organizing side-events in conjunction with the special session. The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women participated in the regional preparatory meeting of ECE, and was represented at the regional preparatory meeting of ECLAC. The Special Adviser attended the ILO Symposium on Beijing+5 entitled "Decent work for women: ILO's Contribution to Women 2000", which was held at Geneva in March 2000.

29. The Office of the Special Adviser and the Division for the Advancement of Women continued to collaborate with the Lessons Learned Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the implementation of the project on gender perspectives in multidimensional peacekeeping operations. The overall findings were published in October 2000 and case studies from a number of individual missions are under preparation. In conjunction with the project, a workshop was held in Namibia in May 2000. The resulting Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action provide greater clarity on gender mainstreaming in the area of peacekeeping. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations established gender units in both Kosovo, in 1999, and East Timor, in 2000, to promote incorporation of gender perspectives in all aspects of the work of the missions. The Office of the Special Adviser has supported the efforts of the Department by providing advice and support to the Gender Units on request. Efforts were made to influence the implementation plans developed on the basis of the Brahimi report from a gender perspective, including through the recommendation for a Gender Unit in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

30. The Special Adviser and the Executive Director of UNIFEM were invited to address the special session of the Security Council on women, peace and security. The resulting Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) provides a strengthened mandate for gender mainstreaming in peace support operations. To ensure collaboration and coordination of the efforts of the relevant parts of the United Nations system in promoting, facilitating and supporting the incorporation of gender perspectives into peace support operations, an inter-agency task force was established as part of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

31. As part of follow-up to General Assembly resolution 52/100 of 12 December 1997 and Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 of 18 July 1997, in which the General Assembly and the Council, respectively, requested all bodies dealing with programme and budgetary matters to ensure that programmes, medium-term plans and programme budgets visibly mainstream gender perspectives, as well as the strong emphasis in the outcome of the Beijing+5 special session on budgetary processes and

resource allocations, many departments and regional commissions increased their attention to gender perspectives in the medium-term plans for 2002-2005. Many programmes, e.g., the programmes on peacekeeping, human settlements, human rights, protection of and assistance to refugees, trade and development and the programmes of all the regional commissions, have moved beyond a general mention of gender mainstreaming in the introductory section to more specific attention to gender perspectives in subprogrammes.

32. The Programme Planning and Budget Division in the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, prepared clear instructions for the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. Programme managers were requested to ensure that in all subprogrammes at least one accomplishment with an appropriate indicator reflects the gender dimensions of the work. All entities in the United Nations have made efforts to identify and incorporate gender perspectives in their submissions. The work on planning and budgetary processes is supported by the work carried out in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality task force on gender mainstreaming in budget processes.

33. The Department of Political Affairs participated in an Inter-Agency Committee project on gender mainstreaming in programme budgets, which included a workshop for managers within the department to discuss how gender perspectives could be more effectively incorporated in programme budgets.

34. The Department for Disarmament Affairs moved beyond encouraging the nomination of female candidates to its fellowship programme, to including a briefing for the fellows on gender perspectives in all areas of disarmament — small arms, weapons of mass destruction, landmines, disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation programmes and disarmament for development initiatives.

35. The Division for the Advancement of Women in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with UNDP, organized a seminar on gender mainstreaming in the governance and poverty programmes of the Africa Branch of UNDP.[2]

36. OHCHR's policy statement on gender mainstreaming and the human rights of women is now included as part of OHCHR's web site. A series of two-day workshops was organized for all staff at Geneva and gender perspectives have been included in the human rights training manuals for judges, prison guards and police officers. A draft checklist for integrating gender perspectives into all aspects of OHCHR's work has also been developed.

37. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has documented three success stories on gender and environment. A framework for a global network of gender and environment focal points from both Governments and NGOs is being finalized. The focal point system would provide an opportunity for information exchange and data collection as well as capacity-building at the national, regional and global levels.

38. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held an expert workshop prior to UNCTAD X, which was held in Bangkok, from 12 to 19 February 2000, to discuss gender perspectives in trade and development. The workshop recognized that the process of globalization brings a number of new challenges to the promotion of gender equality. Concrete recommendations were made to UNCTAD X concerning the integration of gender concerns into regular sessions of the Trade and Development Board; incorporation of gender perspectives into analytical work, policy development and flagship publications of UNCTAD; identification of good practices; promotion of full and equal participation of women in trade-related activities at all levels; and development of a strategy for making gender perspectives a core part of UNCTAD activities.

C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality

39. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE), chaired by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, has continued to provide an excellent forum for fostering and facilitating greater attention to gender perspectives in substantive work of the United Nations and supporting increased collaboration and coordination throughout the system. The Committee continues to carry out its work programme through task forces with clearly defined and time-limited mandates. The task forces report to the Committee as a whole and the Committee adopts their annual work programmes.

40. Following the fifth session of the IACWGE, from 23 to 25 February 2000, inter-sessional work was conducted on a number of topics by the Committee's task forces. Task forces have continued to be active in the following areas under the guidance of the designated task managers: gender focal points — UNFPA; compilation of good practices in implementing the Platform for Action — UNIFEM; database on gender training materials — UNICEF and UNDP; tools and indicators for gender impact analysis, monitoring and evaluation — ECLAC in collaboration with the other regional commissions; and gender mainstreaming in programme budgets — Office of the Special Adviser. Several of these were expected to be concluded at the Committee's next session in February 2001. Two new task forces established at the fifth session of the Committee began to initiate activities: gender mainstreaming in the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF) process — UNIFEM; and gender and information and communication technologies — International Telecommunication Union (ITU). A series of informal meetings was held in New York during 2000, particularly on the preparations and follow-up to the Beijing+5 special session, and the Geneva-based members of the Committee continued to meet regularly.

41. Based on the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Committee at its fourth session in February 1999, the ACC submitted a statement to the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session (A/S-23/8, annex). In their statement, members of the ACC commit themselves to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and to promote gender mainstreaming within their organizations.

42. An Inter-Agency Steering Committee for the Beijing+5 special session, chaired by the Special Adviser, met regularly to ensure coordination of preparations, and the Deputy Secretary-General met with senior United Nations officials on preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". During the special session members of the Inter-Agency Committee prepared panels, presentations and exhibitions. The task forces on good practices in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and on gender training materials launched their databases during the special session. In conjunction with the Beijing+5 special session, the task force on gender mainstreaming in programme budgets organized a workshop to present the findings of their work.

43. In response to recent developments, the Inter-Agency Committee established two new task forces. A task force on financing for development (ILO) would work to influence the preparations for the "high-level intergovernmental event" which will consider issues relating to financing for development, scheduled to take place in March 2002. The task force on women, peace and security, chaired by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, provided input to the discussion of the Security Council on women, peace and security on 24 October 2000, and was preparing an action plan for the collaborative and coordinated implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the United Nations system.

44. The Committee continued its active collaboration with the OECD/DAC Working Party on Gender Equality. The annual joint workshop on governance, poverty reduction and gender equality was, however, postponed from October 2000 to early 2001. The sixth session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality will take place in New York from 26 February to 2 March 2001.

D. Expert group meetings and other activities organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women

1. Expert group meeting on the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its gender implications

45. International experts gathered in Windhoek from 13 to 17 November 2000 in a meeting on "The HIV/AIDS pandemic and its gender implications", organized by the United Nations Secretariat Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with WHO and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The Namibian Government hosted the meeting, which brought together experts and observers from different regions working on HIV/AIDS as well as observers from Governments, the United Nations system and NGOs. The meeting addressed the seriousness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, especially in Africa, and its gender dimensions.

46. Experts concluded that the HIV/AIDS pandemic must be regarded as a disaster that required gender-

sensitive short-term relief measures to alleviate immediate emergencies and long-term interventions that transformed relations between women and men to eliminate gender inequality and reduce the risk of infection. It urged Governments and the international community to distribute immediately emergency food aid, including nutrient supplements and home-based care packs to women and men living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in the most severely affected countries and regions of the world.

47. The role of men and changes in gender relations were considered key elements in fighting the pandemic. Experts appealed to Governments, international organizations and NGOs to upscale significantly their work with men to challenge gender inequalities in relation to HIV and AIDS, and to encourage men's fuller participation in prevention, impact alleviation and care.

48. The experts' recommendations have been forwarded to the Commission on the Status of Women at the current session, at which it would consider "Women, the girl-child and HIV/AIDS" as a priority theme.

2. Expert group meeting on gender and racial discrimination

49. The Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with OHCHR and UNIFEM, organized an expert group meeting on the theme of "Gender and racial discrimination". The meeting was hosted by the Government of Croatia in Zagreb, and took place from 21 to 24 November 2000.

50. The meeting was convened to consider the intersection of gender and racial discrimination and its consequences, as well as new and emerging manifestations of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance and the difficulties that women encountered in that respect.

51. The meeting considered three main topics: the intersection of gender and racial discrimination directed towards women and girls, such as ethnic/gender-based violence and trafficking; the disadvantages, obstacles and difficulties women face in the enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights as a result of the intersection of racial and sex discrimination both in public and private domain; and measures to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and their specific effects on women and girls and provision of remedies and redress.

52. The expert group meeting made recommendations directed to Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional bodies and civil society. The recommendations aimed to refine and expand the "actions to be taken" at both international and national levels outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the further actions identified by the special session of the General Assembly on Beijing+5.

53. The results of the meeting have been made available to the Commission on the Status of Women at its current session, at which it would take up, inter alia, the thematic issue of gender and all forms of discrimination, in particular racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has indicated that the meeting's results would be included in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, as well as the World Conference itself, which will take place in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 7 September 2001.

3. Meeting on the draft rules of procedure of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

54. Members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women met in Berlin at the invitation of the Government of Germany, from 27 to 30 November 2000. The purpose of the meeting was to review and finalize the draft rules of procedure for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Two members of the Human Rights Committee served as resource persons, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was also represented.

55. The draft rules of procedure, which were finalized at the meeting, were subsequently adopted by the Committee at its twenty-fourth session in January 2001. The Optional Protocol to the Convention entered into force on 22 December 2000.

4. Advisory services provided by the Division for the Advancement of Women

56. The Gender Advisory Services Unit of the Division for the Advancement of Women of the

Department for Economic and Social Affairs implements technical cooperation programmes for the advancement of women and gender equality. This technical cooperation depends on Member States' requirements for technical support. Most Member States have begun to indicate a shift in government policy in terms of recognition of a gender equality approach to policy design, formulation and implementation.

57. In this context, the setting up and/or strengthening of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women became an essential tool to move the gender equality agenda forward. However, national machineries were often marginalized and lack the capacity and resources to play a more effective role. The Division currently collaborates with the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration to address these issues. They have established a task force to provide technical support for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project aimed at building the capacity of national machineries to promote gender equality in Africa. The project would promote mainstreaming of a gender perspective in national planning through a needs assessment and subregional workshops on gender sensitive national planning. It would also strengthen the data collection and analysis capacity to produce sex-disaggregated data related to the Convention as well as management information systems. To launch the project, a consultation meeting was organized on 12 June 2000 that brought together participants from Africa to implement the Secretary-General's directive to give priority to Africa's urgent development challenges, and the Arab, Caribbean, European, and Asia Pacific regions for an interregional perspective. Representatives from ECA and ESCWA and United Nations agencies such as UNFPA, UNDP and UNIFEM also participated.

58. The Division for the Advancement of Women carried out a study in collaboration with UNDP/Africa to assess gender mainstreaming activities in UNDP's governance and poverty eradication programme. The assessment was conducted in 22 sub-Saharan countries and completed in January 2000. A technical review meeting was held on 20 and 21 March to discuss the findings of the study. Participants included representatives from country offices, other divisions in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as well as United Nations agencies, including UNFPA and UNIFEM. A report summarizing the discussions and recommendations includes a work plan prioritizing these recommendations as immediate, short-term and medium-term action. The results of the study will be launched on International Women's Day on 8 March 2001.

E. Reported activities of non-governmental organizations and other institutions of civil society

59. Since the issuance of the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/55/293), a number of events have occurred at the international, regional and national levels under the auspices of NGOs. While these activities were not reported systematically to the Secretariat, some were brought to the attention of the Division for the Advancement of Women and were noted as examples of the widespread follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly by civil society.

60. Initiated by the Fédération des Femmes du Québec, a Canadian NGO, the World March of Women 2000, a global initiative that involved approximately 5,000 NGOs from 159 countries, culminated in New York in October 2000. Participants in each country conducted grass-roots activities to bring attention to, and develop proposals for addressing, the issues of poverty and violence against women. The march and the signed petitions highlighted and drew attention to the need for concrete measures to eliminate poverty, to ensure an equitable distribution of the world's wealth, to eradicate violence against women, and to ensure equality between women and men. A panel discussion was held on 17 October 2000 at the United Nations to mark the culmination of the World March of Women 2000, and the commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. An international delegation, made up of 250 participants of the March, attended the panel discussion, which was addressed by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

61. The International Criminal Court Women's Caucus for Gender Justice coordinated a one-day public hearing on crimes against women in recent wars

and conflict situations as a part of the Tokyo Tribunal 2000. The one-day public hearing, coordinated by the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice and co-sponsored by VAWW-Net Japan and ASCENT, included testimonies of victims and survivors of wars and conflicts in different regions of the globe.

62. The International Women's Tribune Center launched its web site, providing another link for women on the Internet. The site was designed to provide web addresses for a number of organizations for women and girls, thereby enabling networking.

63. African NGOs met in Accra, Ghana, in October 2000 to review the "case stories" they had drafted for the second meeting on the "African Best Practices for Gender Integration" publication. The meeting brought together nine NGO representatives from seven African countries, and was co-sponsored by the Gender Development Institute of Ghana and the Commission on the Advancement of Women. The Commission on the Advancement of Women aims to launch this publication at the annual Forum.

64. The NGO Women and Armed Conflict Caucus began to work towards bringing gender perspectives on armed conflict to the attention of the Security Council following the Security Council press release on women and peace issued for International Women's Day (8 March 2000). The Caucus facilitated the presentation of the views of women from armed conflict zones to Security Council delegations and relevant United Nations departments at events and private meetings during the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in March 2000, and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, in June 2000. The Coalition on Women and International Peace and Security was formed by members of the caucus based in New York and London specifically to coordinate preparation of the Arria Formula Meeting, held on 23 October 2000, and the meeting of the Security Council on women and peace and security. The Coalition was coordinated by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and included Amnesty International, the International Peace Research Association, The Hague Appeal for Peace, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and International Alert. The Coalition worked closely with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and the Namibian delegation to the United Nations, in identifying appropriate experts from the field for the Arria Formula briefing by NGOs to Security Council members. It also assisted in widely publicizing the meeting held on 24 October 2000 and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) adopted on 31 October 2000. The Coalition intends to continue to monitor implementation of the resolution.

65. The NGO Community on the Status of Women launched a LISTSERV to connect women worldwide with timely information coming out of the United Nations in New York. It initially targeted women who indicated an interest at the Beijing+5 meetings, and gave subscribers email information about the Commission on the Status of Women meetings and NGO events, and was designed to assist the NGO community in follow-up to Beijing+5.

66. NGOs have advanced gender issues for interaction at the special session of the General Assembly on children to be held from 19 to 21 September 2001. Organizations like the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, the Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, the International Federation of University Women, ESCAP and others interested in gender issues affecting children, hosted workshops on various subjects, including HIV/AIDS, emerging health issues affecting girls, education of refugee girls, tolerance and reconciliation, sexual exploitation of girls, and violence against girls. They were presented as part of an NGO programme to provide Governments and NGOs with information for drafting the outcome document of the Beijing+5 special session. The workshops were held in conjunction with the second session of the Preparatory Committee in January 2000.

67. Women'sNet, which aims to empower women to use information and communication technologies more effectively in their struggle towards advancing women's equality, received an "Innovative users of Internet" award at the Highway Africa Conference 2000. The spirit of the award was to inspire greater use of the Internet on the African continent. It is the only web site of its kind in South Africa. In an attempt to make this kind of information accessible to a wider community, Women'sNet forges partnerships with gender organizations and networks across South Africa and Africa. It has also started a community radio project.

68. In July 2000, 35 representatives of water management, water users and information

organizations from Asia, Africa, South America and Europe met in Paris for three days to define the tasks of the newly formed Gender and Water Alliance. Initiated at the Second World Water Forum, in March 2000, the Gender and Water Alliance is an informal network of individuals, NGOs, resource centres, research institutions, grass-roots organizations, and regional, national and local institutions. Its goal was to achieve equality among women and men, regarding participation and decision-making in the water resources management.

69. The International Women's Democracy Centre, in partnership with the Ulster People's College in Belfast, Northern Ireland, brought together women leaders from Northern Ireland for a two-week programme to learn the process of lobbying. Designed to develop and strengthen their public policy, advocacy and lobbying skills, the hands-on, innovative training programme combined theoretical learning and practical experience focusing on the interaction of the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government with the public and private sectors to create public policy. The diverse group came from both rural and urban areas and different regional backgrounds.

70. Latin American countries and a growing number of other countries around the world have recognized 25 November as the International Day Against Violence Against Women. It was first celebrated by the first Feminist Encuentro for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogota, Colombia, from 18 to 21 July 1981, when women systematically denounced gender violence from domestic battery to rape and sexual harassment, to state violence, including torture and abuse of women political prisoners. On 17 December 1999, the United Nations adopted resolution 54/134, designating 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The first observance of the Day in the United Nations was held on 25 November 2000.

71. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts launched an initiative to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in November 2000. Ten million girl guides and girl scouts in 150 countries earned a badge through specific activities that would help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS or for projects that help persons infected with HIV/AIDS. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, International Council of AIDS Service Organizations and UNAIDS developed resource materials, which were distributed in December 2000 to all national organizations of WAGGGS.

III. Information supplied in accordance with specific mandates

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations in the United Nations system

72. In its resolution 2000/23 of 28 July 2000, the Economic and Social Council requested a report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. The present report, which covers the period from September 1999 to September 2000, is based on information from United Nations bodies that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories and refugee camps. Such bodies include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories[3] and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. The report is also based on information submitted by entities of the United Nations system providing assistance to Palestinian people, i.e., ESCWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), ILO, the World Bank and UNICEF.

1. Situation of Palestinian women

73. In his report on the Palestinian economy, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories stated that, according to estimates from the Palestinian Ministry of Finance and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Palestinian economy improved in 1998: real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by about 7 per cent; Palestinian labour flows to Israel by 15 per cent; Israeli-Palestinian trade by 9 per cent. Donors' assistance increased by 12 per cent. In addition, the Palestinian Ministry of Finance and IMF revised their growth forecasts for 1999 upward to 6 per cent. In 1999, employment and labour force participation both increased so that the combined effect on the unemployment rate was a decline to 12.7 per cent from 15.6 per cent in 1998.[4]

74. Women's employment and participation in the labour force grew faster than for men. This could be explained by the rapid expansion in the agriculture and services sectors, including public services, where women were present in high numbers.[5] However, women were still found mainly in part-time jobs. In 1999, the proportion of women working less than 35 hours per week increased by 34.76 per cent while the same figure for men fell by 11.66 per cent. This tendency might have resulted from two factors. First, in the expanding agricultural sector women perform unpaid work, which is therefore not accounted for; secondly, married women tend to seek part-time jobs to increase the household income. Unemployment figures in 1999 suggest that the gap between women and men widened. In fact, while the number of unemployed men fell significantly — by 14.45 per cent — the number of unemployed women was nearly unchanged, falling only by 1.80 per cent.[5]

75. In 1999 there was no reduction in the severity of the closure policy applied by Israel to the occupied territories. Personal mobility remained severely restricted as Palestinians could not travel freely between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or enter Jerusalem without permits from the Israeli authorities. Palestinian public agencies, businesses, NGOs and international agencies continued to experience higher transaction costs, time delays, and loss of productivity as a result of restrictions in the movement of personnel and goods at border crossings.[5]

76. The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/55/373) stated that closures and restrictions at checkpoints continued to remain a cause of concern to Palestinians. For instance, on 9 February 2000, Israeli soldiers raided a Palestinian house and held family members, including women and children, at gunpoint. One woman suffered a heart attack. As the car transporting her to the hospital was delayed at an Israeli checkpoint (ibid., para. 84) she died.

77. The Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, Mr. Giorgio Giacomelli (Italy), in his report to the Commission on Human Rights stated that the Israeli policy of closures and permits also affected the right to education as it had serious repercussions for students in the Gaza Strip. In fact, more than 1,300 students from Gaza were prevented from studying at universities and Palestinian institutions of higher education in the West Bank because Israel considered them to be a security risk (E/CN.4/2000/25, para. 47). In the same report, the Special Rapporteur noted that the issue of Palestinian prisoners detained in Israeli prisons remained a source of great concern. Although there had been releases of Palestinian (political) prisoners, within the framework of the peace agreements, the number remained high at 1,500. The conditions of detention were below international standards and difficulties of access to prisoners were faced by their lawyers as well as by their families.

78. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, reported that, in Ramallah, at various times, the General Security Service had banned parents, wives and siblings of 200 prisoners from visiting them (A/55/373, para. 114). The Special Committee also reported that the prison service had withheld permission for a British physician to examine the condition of a 16-year-old Palestinian girl detained in Ramle (ibid., para. 110).

79. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, harsh prison sentences often had the effect of taking fathers away from children and, upon their release from prison, led to an incidence of violence in the family. As a consequence, in many cases, men lost their protective and breadwinner's role within the household while women were forced to take additional burdens and acquire roles other than the ones traditionally performed by them (see E/CN.4/2000/25, para. 43) in order to provide for all the economic and social needs of the family. It is important to note two aspects related to women taking on new roles: on the one hand, it might lead to conflicts within the family due to the difficulty in adapting to and accepting change; on the other, it might provide opportunities for women's empowerment as women gain new decision-making power within the household.

80. The expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolishing of Palestinian homes and the building of bypass roads in the occupied territories continued to create difficulties for the Palestinians. In particular, the demolishing of houses in Jerusalem often forced families to consider moving to the West Bank, where it would have been cheaper to buy or rent another house, but where they would have lost their residency rights.

An incident of this kind was reported by the Special Committee (see A/55/373, para. 57).

81. The report of the Special Committee also stated that, according to the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health, the toxic gas pollution of the West Bank's water sources controlled by Israel, caused numerous miscarriages among Palestinian women (ibid., para. 60) living in the West Bank.

82. As the present report covers the period September 1999 to September 2000, it does not contain information related to the effects of the violent confrontation between Palestinian civilians and Israeli security forces that erupted at the end of September 2000. Clashes spread provoking numerous deaths, particularly among Palestinian civilians, including youth. Such violence had negative economic and social effects in the occupied territories as well as serious repercussions on the peace process and on the ability of the organizations of the United Nations system to operate effectively in the occupied territories.

2. Assistance to Palestinian women

83. The organizations of the United Nations system continued to provide assistance to Palestinian people, in particular women.

84. During the period under review, ESCWA prepared a study on gender and citizenship and the role of NGOs in the occupied territories, aimed at proposing action-oriented policy recommendations to inculcate a gender-sensitive citizenship in post-conflict countries. ESCWA organized a workshop for producers and users of sex-disaggregated data in the occupied territories and started ongoing projects such as a database on Palestinian refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon; a regional household survey in the occupied territories; and the development of national gender statistics in the Arab countries, including the occupied territories.

85. UNRWA provides essential education, health, relief and social services to some 3.7 million registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations comprising Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Assistance to Palestinian women is a priority, delivered within the context of the Agency's regular programmes for Palestine refugees.

86. During the period under review, UNRWA began a review of its gender policies with external technical expertise and funding from the Government of Denmark. The review sought to align the Agency's gender policy and practice more closely with the framework and targets agreed at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and subsequently reviewed at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

87. In the 1999/2000 scholastic year, 468,651 pupils were enrolled in the Agency's elementary, preparatory and secondary schools, of whom 234,500, or 50 per cent, were female. Women accounted for 69 per cent of participants in UNRWA's pre- and in-service teacher training courses, and for 63 per cent of trainees in UNRWA's technical/semi-professional courses. Of the 673 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 1999/2000, 45.3 per cent were held by women. In addition, 14 Palestinian women in Lebanon would benefit from a scholarship project during 1999/2000 addressed to women only and managed by UNRWA on behalf of the Canadian International Development Research Centre.

88. UNRWA provided maternal and child health care and family planning services and sustained full immunization coverage to women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Those services were supported by school health services as well as by health educational programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

89. Difficult socio-economic conditions in refugee communities during the reporting period continued to create greater reliance on income earned by women. More than 50 per cent of UNRWA's special hardship case families, who received direct food and material assistance from the Agency, were headed by women. UNRWA's women-in-development programme provided a wide range of social, cultural and educational services at the community level. Seventy Women's Programme Centres served as focal points within the refugee community for UNRWA's work with women. From the beginning of 2000 until 30 July 2000, a total of 27,634 participants benefited from the various activities of the Centres, such as computer training, photography, English language courses, child care services for working women, group-guaranteed lending, awareness-raising campaigns on health, disability diagnosis and awareness and legal

counselling. The Agency is currently reviewing the quality of training at the Centres, with the aim of facilitating employment of women upon graduation.

90. During 1999/2000, UNRWA's income generation programme granted loans valued at $3.12 million to 3,716 women, who supported 20,050 dependants. Since 1994, the Solidarity Group Lending Programme has provided loans worth $11.39 million to 15,183 women organized in 2,271 solidarity groups. These women were granted loans at the end of each successful repayment cycle. The programme was self-sufficient with all operational costs and loan loss provision covered from revenues generated by lending and banking activities. The programme maintained an annual repayment rate of 98.65 per cent.

91. During the period under review, the ILO Arab regional office undertook a series of activities in support and assistance to Palestinian women:

- *Gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Labour (Gaza and Ramallah)*

  The inter-ministerial coordinating committee for the advancement of women mainstreamed gender concerns in certain ministries. In August 2000, the ILO supported a workshop, held in Ramallah, to develop an action plan for the Ministry of Labour.

- *Strategy formulation on the promotion and development of women's entrepreneurship*

  Several activities were executed in the framework of a 1996-1999 training programme implemented by the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, Italy, to promote and develop Palestinian women's entrepreneurship. In particular, four courses to train trainers to develop technical capacities and nine technical workshops to enhance the knowledge and skills of women entrepreneurs were undertaken. In May 2000, a seminar comprising national governmental, non-governmental and private sector stakeholders was organized to design a national strategy for women's entrepreneurship development.

- *ILO multidisciplinary mission to the West Bank and Gaza*

  From 31 January to 11 February 2000, the ILO developed two project proposals for the advancement of women. The first project aimed to strengthen the inter-ministerial committee for the advancement of women and the second to promote and develop female entrepreneurship.

- *Capacity-building programme on gender, poverty and employment*

  In December 1999, a subregional planning seminar for the Arab States was organized in Beirut on an ILO capacity-building programme on gender, poverty and employment that resulted in national action plans. The action plan for West Bank and Gaza was developed into a draft project proposal early in 2000 and is expected to be developed further into a full-fledged project document.

92. In January 1999, the World Bank formally established a Consultative Council on Gender in the Middle East and North Africa Region in order to formulate solutions to the most pertinent gender concerns in the area. In the period under review, the World Bank undertook various assistance programmes and projects, including:

- *Comprehensive development framework*

  A programme to address the increasing need for a holistic integrated approach to development balancing macroeconomic stability with human, social and structural elements.

- *The Second Committee development project*

  A project designed and implemented with the full participation of women and included targeted interventions such as promoting women's centres and kindergartens.

- *The Palestinian NGO project*

  A project which financially and technically supported NGOs that targeted the poor and marginalized Palestinian population, 70 per cent of whom were women.

- *The education and health rehabilitation project*

  This project was completed in December 1999. It provided for appropriate and adequate sanitary facilities at school sites, promoted the development of teaching material free of gender

bias, and aimed at increasing girls' access to schools.

- *The pilot training centre for disadvantaged youth*

  Funded through the World Bank Development Market Place 2000 Competition, the centre would be created as part of a pilot project that targets poor rural young women and men who currently have no training skills useful in today's job market.

93. Based on its programme of cooperation with the Palestinian Authority for the years 1998-2000, UNICEF addresses gender issues through its programmes for Palestinian children and women.

94. UNICEF promotes advocacy for women's rights by increasing society's awareness of the scope and meaning of women's rights, non-discrimination and gender equality, using information from all its projects and education strategies, including better parenting, gender equity in education and life skills. The UNICEF strategy also supports an enabling environment that influences legislation and mobilizes resources for Palestinian women, in order to monitor and promote women's rights. Different types of media are used in pursuing that strategy, including television, radio, print media and theatre.

95. Within the women's health project, UNICEF supported the following activities aimed at improving the quality of life of Palestinian women:

- Eight-day training for 75 midwives from primary and secondary health care settings in the governmental sector as well as UNRWA and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society;
- Four-day workshop for 125 maternal care health professionals on the promotion of woman and child health and nutrition and the quality of services;
- Ten-day training for physicians and nurses within the obstetric and neonatal departments in four major hospitals;
- The maternal mortality survey being implemented in the West Bank, which would seek, inter alia, to identify the most common causes of maternal death, to strengthen the surveillance system in the country and to monitor the fate of orphans after the death of their mothers.

96. During the period under review, UNICEF supported a five-day training programme on first aid, health promotion, communication and leadership skills for 300 nursery teachers in 12 districts, undertaken within the better parenting initiative implemented with the Ministry of Social Affairs. UNICEF is currently supporting the following activities:

- A study on early marriage and dropouts in the Bethlehem district being conducted to understand the perception, attitude and practice related to early marriage, and to examine the relationship between early marriage and dropping out of school among females who marry early;
- An awareness-raising campaign on gender and development issues among students, grades 7 through 10, attending eight schools in the Bethlehem district;
- A review of new textbooks to assess whether they are gender sensitive. The results of the review would be shared with the Ministry of Education;
- Sixteen gender-training workshops targeting 400 education professionals in 8 districts (5 in the West Bank and 3 in Gaza). The training focuses on gender awareness and sensitization as well as on some basic skills to enable the education professionals to integrate gender into the teaching process.

97. Gender is mainstreamed in both projects of the advocacy and capacity-building programme: the planning, policy formulation and monitoring project and the children and women in need of special protection project. During the period under review, UNICEF worked on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey II (still to be completed) aimed at providing sex-disaggregated data on Palestinian children and women. Furthermore, UNICEF provided:

- Technical and financial support to the Palestinian Authority in drafting the Palestinian Child Rights Charter and ensuring that it was gender sensitive;
- Support to the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs in carrying out a study of orphanages providing long-term residential care with emphasis on the under-served girl child;
- Support to efforts aimed at increasing media coverage of Palestinian children and women, jointly with the Ministry of Information;

- Support to the creation of a network of NGOs working to combat violence against women.

3. Conclusions

98. In the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority, civil society groups and organizations of the United Nations system made considerable efforts to improve the economic and social conditions of Palestinian women. Yet, despite these efforts and in spite of the positive trends of the domestic Palestinian economy in the period under review, women still experienced unequal access to the labour market and income-generating activities and continued to have higher unemployment rates than men. Thus, the situation of women still requires special attention.

99. The status and living conditions of Palestinian women are linked to the achievement of progress in the peace process. Women living in the occupied territories continued to be directly affected by Israeli policies, especially the closure hindering the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, civil society groups and organizations of the United Nations aimed at advancing women.

100. Towards the end of the reporting period, violence between Israeli security forces and Palestinian civilians erupted in the occupied territories creating great concern as it jeopardized the peace process and hindered assistance efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system. It is important that United Nations entities continue to be able to operate in the occupied territories and that efforts are made to continue working for the advancement and empowerment of Palestinian women. It is particularly important that Palestinian women continue to be given assistance in areas such as education, health, social services and micro-credit and that efforts are made to increase their full and equal participation in decision-making and peace programmes.

101. The gender perspective should continue to be fully integrated in international assistance programmes, through inter alia, greater gender analysis and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, which is currently insufficient. Although the reports of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Territories, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967 all provided valuable information on the situation in the occupied territories, they still lack a thorough gender analysis. Thus, it is important to introduce a gender perspective in all studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations on the situation of Palestinian women.

B. Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned in armed conflict

102. At its forty-fourth session, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted resolution 44/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflict. The Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to prepare, taking into account the information provided by Member States and relevant international organizations, a report on the implementation of resolution 44/1 for submission to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fifth session in 2001. In pursuance of this mandate, on 20 July 2000, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all States Members of the United Nations. As of 30 November 2000, the Secretariat had received a total of 17 replies from Member States and 12 replies from relevant entities of the United Nations system.

103. Fourteen Member States reported that they were not involved in armed conflicts, one Member State reported that the country's internal violence had assumed the characteristics of armed conflict and two Member States reported that their citizens, including women and children, were still kept prisoners by the Government of neighbouring countries with which they had been in conflict.

104. The Governments of Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Marshall Islands, Morocco, Nauru, Portugal, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania reported that the situation described in resolution 44/1 did not exist in their respective countries.

105. Although not involved in situations of armed conflicts, the Governments of Argentina, China and the Philippines reported support for international humanitarian law and support for international community efforts to stop and prevent conflicts in order to safeguard the rights of women and children. In

addition, the Government of the Philippines also stated its support for resolution 44/1 and called for the need to create a monitoring body on the proper implementation of the resolution and to ensure that violators were forced to comply.

106. The Government of Spain reported that, although the issue of armed conflict did not affect it directly, the Government was involved in cooperation and development projects in Latin America, including in many countries suffering from instability and violence deriving from wars, where mainly women and children were affected. Some of these projects were implemented by the Institute of Women through its "Women and Development" programme, which, inter alia, aimed to improve the situation of victims, strengthen good governance and prevent conflicts.

107. The Government of Bolivia reported that, although there were no armed conflicts within the country nor between Bolivia and its neighbouring countries, the eradication of cocaine had created a problem of violence in the Chapare area and other rural areas, which had the characteristics of armed conflict and which affected mainly women and children. The Government of Bolivia also stated its support for resolution 44/1 and for international humanitarian law aimed at protecting women and children in situations of armed conflict.

108. The Government of Azerbaijan reported that as a result of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, a total of 4,959 citizens of Azerbaijan were counted as missing, including 71 children, 320 women and 358 elderly people. Efforts of the State Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing People in the 1992-2000 period resulted in the release from Armenian captivity of a total of 1,086 persons, including 67 children, 243 women and 246 elderly persons. The Government reported that, in order to address the issue, in December 1999, it advanced a new initiative in the Committee for Political Issues of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe confirming that the problems of prisoners of war, hostages and missing people should be solved in accordance with the articles of the Geneva Convention.

109. The Government of Kuwait reported that, as a result of the 1990 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, a total of 605 persons, including 7 Kuwaiti women, were held in detention in Iraq. The Government called for the immediate publication by Iraq of the names of the prisoners who were still alive as well as those who had died. It stated that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) should be allowed to perform the assigned tasks in Iraqi prisons and other places of detention in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. The Government of Kuwait stated that Iraq should expedite the tracing process and facilitate the flow of information related to cases of persons still kept in detention. It also stated that the Security Council should exert the necessary pressure on Iraq in order to bring this humanitarian issue to a conclusion, that this issue should be raised in the Security Council each time matters relating to Iraq's compliance with Council resolutions were addressed, and that Iraq's inadequate response to this issue should be taken into account whenever new resolutions were adopted.

110. The Secretariat also requested information from relevant entities of the United Nations system.

111. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations provided information from six of its field missions. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) reported that the conflict in Sierra Leone had been, and continued to be, characterized by a high incidence of abductions of civilians, including men, women and children, for the purposes of forced recruitment, sexual slavery and forced labour. It also reported that many women and girls were forced to become the "bush wives" of their abductors and that social reintegration of released abductees was very difficult due to the stigmatization that accompanied rape and the resulting pregnancies.

112. UNAMSIL reported that the Committee for the Release of Prisoners of War and Non-Combatants, which was established in July 1999 in accordance with the Lomé Peace Agreement, continued to meet on a biweekly basis despite the renewed instances of fighting in Sierra Leone. It designated its representatives to carry out regular fact-finding missions that served to disseminate information about its activities and any options available to the released abductees.

113. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) reported that, according to information collected by the ICRC, following the transfer of prisoners from Kosovo to Serbia in June 1999, there were still 950 persons from Kosovo who remained in detention in Serbia, including 6 women and 6 minors.

114. Since it did not have a mandate to operate within Serbia, UNMIK was not able to monitor directly the conditions or proceedings against the women and children held in detention in Serbia. However, it continued to highlight the issue of these prisoners and attempted to rally international support to advocate for their release. UNMIK also reported that on 1 September 2000, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights appointed a Special Envoy on persons deprived of liberty in connection with the Kosovo crisis in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to seek comprehensive solutions to the problem of missing persons and detainees from Kosovo.

115. It was reported by the United Nations Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) that, in its area of responsibility, the long-standing practice of hostage taking, in which women were sometimes the victims, continued. These cases were indirectly related to the 1992-1993 armed conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, which produced difficult socio-economic conditions, a lack of governance and effective law enforcement. UNOMIG reported that on 1 June 2000, a UNOMIG patrol, including a woman, was taken hostage for five days in the Kadori Valley and that on 4 August 2000, two international field staff workers of the ICRC, both women, together with their male local driver, were kidnapped and held for 10 days in the Pankisi Gorge.

116. UNOMIG reported that in several regions of Georgia, including Abkhazia, one of the greatest threats to the local population, representatives of the international humanitarian organizations and United Nations personnel, seemed to come from loosely organized and poorly commanded paramilitary organizations, some of which may be supported by political circles while others were exclusively criminally motivated.

117. UNOMIG stated that the Commission on the Status of Women should consider the plight of women and children living in "frozen armed conflict" where active military operations have ceased, but where armed combatants remain active. It stated that the situation of women and children in "frozen armed conflict" should also be reflected in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 44/1.

118. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) reported that, further to the violence which erupted in East Timor around the ballot of last year, more than 250,000 East Timorese, among them women and children, were forced over the border to West Timor, Indonesia, where they were kept in camps, often under the control of militia groups, and where access to basic needs and services remained poor. UNTAET reported that, in cooperation with UNHCR, UNICEF and international NGOs, more than 250 separated children were returned to their families in East Timor. A further 180 children were also reunited with their families through the Family Reunion Programme of UNTAET and UNHCR, aiming to bring together separated families from each side of the border.

119. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) stated that it had no relevant information related to the implementation of resolution 44/1 and the United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP) reported that, given its military observer mandate, it has neither the authority, nor the resources or the capability to investigate such matters.

120. In its regular work, the Department of Public Information reported that it had contributed to the implementation of resolution 44/1, particularly through the widespread dissemination of the international instruments on the advancement of women and the human rights of women and children (i.e., the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol), the coverage and promotion of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the organization of press conferences in conjunction with special meetings and awareness-raising activities on the issue.

121. No specific information on women and children taken hostage was provided by OHCHR, UNDP, UNRWA, ECA or ESCWA.

Notes

[1] The Egypt Country Team included representatives of: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO),

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

[2] Technical Review Meeting. Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming and the Empowerment of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Review of UNDP Support Activities, 20-21 March 2000.

[3] In September 1999, the Secretary-General reconfigured the mandate of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. His title was changed to United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. In addition to his responsibilities relating to the occupied Palestinian territory, the Special Coordinator now also has responsibilities for coordinating United Nations development assistance related to the peace process in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic (A/55/137-E/2000/95, para. 2).

[4] See United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories report, Spring 2000, Executive Summary.

[5] Ibid.

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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan

Summary

Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/9 of 27 July 2000, the present report provides an overview of the current situation of women and girls in Afghanistan against the background of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions, continued conflict and discriminatory edicts issued by the Taliban authorities. The report also contains information about actions taken by the United Nations system and assistance community in Afghanistan to improve the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan as recommended in the Economic and Social Council resolution. It also identifies areas in which further efforts are needed.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 14 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/9 on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fifth session on progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. In the resolution, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern over the deteriorating economic and social conditions of women and girls in all areas of Afghanistan and condemned the continuing grave violations of their human rights. The Council encouraged the continuing efforts of the United Nations-assisted programmes in Afghanistan to promote the participation of women in those programmes and to ensure that women benefit equally with men from such programmes. In the resolution the Council also urged that all United Nations activities, including humanitarian assistance, be based on the principle of non-discrimination, incorporate a gender perspective, and actively attempt to promote the participation of both women and men, in conformity with the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan.

3. The resolution specifically referred to the Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan conducted by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women in November 1997 and appealed to all States and the international community to implement the recommendations contained in the report of the mission.[1]

4. The present report, which draws on a wide variety of sources, including organizations[2] of the United Nations system, provides background information (sect. II) and assesses the situation of women and girls in the present socio-economic context (sect. III). It also discusses (sect. IV) progress made by United Nations organizations in implementing the principle-centred approach to the gender issue contained in the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan and the report of the Inter-Agency Gender Mission.

II. Background information

5. The situation of women and girls during armed or other kinds of conflict is increasingly receiving international attention. The special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century", held from 5 to 9 June 2000, showed a growing appreciation, at the international, regional and national levels, of the different impacts conflict has on women and girls, including an increasing awareness of the need to address their rights and needs in the context of conflict. The special session also showed a clear understanding of the role of women in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peace-building and post-conflict societal reconstruction and building on the critical areas, women and armed conflict, of the Beijing Platform for Action.

6. On 8 March 2000, the Security Council took a landmark decision to incorporate women and girls in all its deliberations, not just as victims of armed conflict, but also as constructive actors in finding peace. The Council affirmed the equal access to and full participation of women in power structures and underscored the importance of promoting an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes while addressing armed or other conflicts.[3] At its meeting on 7 April 2000 on the situation in Afghanistan, the Council focused on discriminatory policies against Afghan women, particularly in Taliban-controlled areas. In the statement by the President of the Security Council,[4] the Council condemned grave violations of the human rights of women and girls, including all forms of discrimination against them, particularly in areas under control by the Taliban. It called on all parties, in particular the Taliban, to take measures to end all violations of women's rights. During the debate, the Council requested the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to respond to specific questions relating to gender issues.

7. At the meeting of the Security Council at which it considered "Women, peace and security", held on 24 and 25 October 2000, the Council further underlined the important role of women as equal partners with men in peacemaking and peace-building. The Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, which constitutes a new step forward to enhance women's role in peacemaking and peace operations.

8. Despite international pressure on Afghan parties to the conflict and measures taken by the United Nations and the international community in resolutions and statements of the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the

Commission on the Status of Women and despite the tireless efforts of the assistance community to improve the situation of Afghan women and girls, the overall situation has not shown significant improvement. Any discussion of factors relating to the situation of Afghan women and girls, requires an awareness of the complex mix of the conflict, the political situation, tribal and ethnic differences, gender relations and religion in Afghan society.

9. The armed conflict between the Taliban movement, which controls 95 per cent of the country, including its capital Kabul, and the United Front continued through the summer and fall of 2000. A significant characteristic of offensives in 1999 and 2000 was the deliberate targeting of civilians. Although the entire Afghan population suffers under armed conflict, women and girls are particularly affected. Afghan women have borne enormous hardships throughout the years of conflict. The population, including women and children have been bombed indiscriminately, deliberately targeted with violence and subjected to a wide range of human rights violations, as described in a series of reports provided by Mr. Kamal Hossain, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights.[5] One study reports that more than 76 per cent of women's deaths during the war were due to aerial bombings.[6] According to another survey conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1999, replies from Afghan respondents revealed that 83 per cent of the population had been forced to leave their homes due to the war, 53 per cent reported that a member of their immediate family had been killed during conflict, and 16 per cent reported knowing someone who was raped.[7]

10. Cultural norms and traditions in Afghanistan have been historically conservative and characterized by a strong division of gender roles where political, economic and social decision-making is largely determined by males. Control by the Taliban exacerbated the situation of women. Most members of the Taliban movement appear to hold the belief that the State should preserve the dignity and honour of families and guarantee the personal security of women. The combination of an ultraconservative interpretation of Islam with tribal patriarchal norms of conduct, and institutionalized gender discrimination had been reflected in a series of legislative acts (edicts) affecting women adversely.

11. Despite all the peacemaking efforts undertaken by the international community to end the fighting in 2000, described in four progress reports[8] of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan, developments in the country give little ground for optimism. An agreement of 2 November 2000, reached between the Taliban and the United Front, to enter into a process of dialogue under United Nations auspices, without preconditions in order to bring an end to the Afghan conflict by political means, provided a glimmer of hope. However, the recent decision by the Taliban to withdraw from the agreement in protest over the sanctions imposed by the Security Council in its resolution 1333 (2000) of 19 December 2000 gave further cause for concern.

III. The socio-economic situation

12. The people of Afghanistan continue to suffer from the accumulated effects of war and economic collapse. Recent reports have emphasized that the coping capacity of the civilian population has been severely weakened as a result of the war and the erosion of many traditional coping mechanisms including, in particular, the role of extended family networks.[9]

13. The country is also suffering from the worst drought in the region since 1971. The drought has led to increased malnutrition, large livestock losses, the loss of crops, a higher incidence of diseases, and an increase in the overall vulnerability of both rural and urban populations. Two consecutive years of natural emergencies, including droughts, floods and earthquakes, have left millions of people with little access to food. The country faces an acute food crisis in 2000-2001, with the cereal deficit exceeding 2.3 million tons, more than double that of 1999. The World Food Programme (WFP) Hunger Map, which identifies hunger hot spots, listed Afghanistan as one of the countries facing the greatest problems in 2001. It is estimated that nearly 4 million people are on the brink of starvation.

14. In terms of human development indicators, Afghanistan is ranked among the lowest in the world. It is, for example, estimated that one quarter of all children die before they reach the age of five. Literacy rates are approximately 35 per cent for the whole population,[10] but only 13 per cent for females in urban areas and 3 to 4 per cent in rural districts.[11] The

maternal mortality rates are the second highest in the world, with nearly 1,700 per 100,000 live births. Furthermore, only 12 per cent of women are estimated to have access to even the most basic health care, a situation that has changed little since the Inter-Agency Gender Mission in 1997.

15. The resumption of the conflict in the north-east during the past summer resulted in yet another massive forced displacement of the civilian population. Almost 130,000 people were displaced in 1999-2000. Large numbers of people have also left their homes due to the drought, in order to search for any available means of livelihood. Currently, some 40,000 people from the severely drought-affected and remote districts of Ghor, Badghis and Faryab provinces, now live in makeshift shelters in Herat, the main urban area in the west.

16. The situation of some 2.6 million Afghan refugees residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan has worsened, owing to both asylum fatigue and donor fatigue. Despite the harsh economic situation and the ongoing fighting in Afghanistan, many Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan have recently decided to return home because their predicament in those countries has become harder. At the end of last September, a total of 170,000 Afghan refugees returned voluntarily with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the WFP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). However, voluntary repatriation is a durable solution only for those who own productive assets or those who have the means to engage in the limited labour market.[12]

17. Afghanistan is one of the world's most mine-affected areas in the world. Land mines injure more than 8,000 people each year, including many women and children. It is estimated that over 700 square kilometres of the country are still contaminated by mines. During 1999-2000, the Mine Action Programme in Afghanistan, in close cooperation with United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other entities, cleared over 43.7 square kilometres of high-priority mined areas and 101.2 square kilometres of former battlefield in 20 provinces of Afghanistan. A further 51 square kilometres of mined areas and 103.8 square kilometres of former battlefield were surveyed and marked. Some 28,000 mines and 265,000 unexploded ordnance were destroyed during 1999, with a further 160,574 destroyed in 2000. The Mine Action Programme in Afghanistan also provided mine-awareness training to 332,396 civilians.[13] The severe shortfall of funding for the period September through December 2000 has, however, forced the programme to suspend its staff on two months' leave without pay and to freeze staff salaries and increments. As a further consequence, only 64 per cent of the sites targeted for clearance were completed in 2000.[14]

18. Because of the many years of fighting, almost all institutions of governance have been destroyed. Afghanistan does not have an effective government, constitution, rule of law or independent judiciary. The Islamic courts and religious police enforce Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and punishment. Civil institutions are largely non-existent and policies and laws vary, depending on the region and the local commanders. Taliban's edicts are not evenly enforced throughout the areas under its control. For example, projects approved by local officials are not always endorsed by Kandahar officials and vice versa. Many educated Afghans who have had the option to leave the country have done so, either permanently or temporarily, as refugees or migrant labourers in other countries, contributing to a brain drain from Afghanistan.[15] The absence of a central government capable of developing policies and guidelines for the social and economic development of the country has had devastating effects on its population. The governance environment in Afghanistan today is defined by continuing war. As a result, virtually no domestic resources are marshalled for the purpose of organized relief, rehabilitation or reconstruction.[16] The annual budget, at $70.9 million, is equivalent to approximately 0.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). This means that Afghanistan allocates a smaller percentage of its national income to central government expenditure than any other country reporting in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*.[17]

A. Health

19. Following years of conflict, basic infrastructure, including health care, is left in a critical state. This has severely affected the health situation of women and children. The life expectancy for women is only 46 years.[18] Tuberculosis rates for women are among the highest in the world. There are approximately 133,000 cases, 70 per cent of which are females aged 15 to 45.

The drought has, furthermore, aggravated the situation as access to water has been considerably reduced. Water quality has deteriorated in many urban areas and the limited availability of drinking water in both urban and rural areas is now a critical health issue. It is estimated that less than one quarter of the population has access to clean water and that only 12 per cent have access to sanitation.[19] A curable disease such as diarrhoea alone kills an estimated 85,000 children each year. Moreover, most hospitals, health care centres and medical centres have largely been destroyed by war, and those remaining are mainly located in the urban centres. Currently, there is an average of only one physician for every 50,000 people in Afghanistan. Combined with the flight of trained personnel and the low capacity to produce new generations of doctors, nurses and health workers the current health care situation remains an area of deep concern to the international community.

20. The health situation of women and girls is further aggravated by the complete segregation in the provision of health services for males and females. This has enormously curtailed women's access to these services, especially when there is only a very small number of female doctors and trained nurses practising under severe restrictions in hospitals.[20] As noted above, basic health indicators reflect the alarming health situation of Afghan women and children, in particular regarding reproductive health where the maternal mortality rate is exceedingly high. An estimated 15,000 Afghan women die every year of pregnancy-related causes. According to WHO, only 12 per cent of deliveries in Afghanistan are attended by trained health workers, mostly traditional birth attendants. The fertility rate in Afghanistan is among the highest in the world, seven births per woman.[21]

21. Approximately 4 per cent of the Afghan population, or some 800,000 people, are disabled as a result of war, landmines, polio and poor basic health care in the country. A high rate of birth complications, for example, especially in undernourished women with inadequate medical care, gives rise to disabilities such as cerebral palsy. The Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Programme, together with several NGOs and the ICRC, has provided assistance and rehabilitation services to a large number of disabled people in Afghanistan. The humanitarian challenges involved in assisting the disabled remain enormous. Inadequate referral services mean that minor disabilities that could easily be prevented become complicated and irreversible. Furthermore, many disabled people, because of their lack of employment opportunities, become a socio-economic burden on their families and society.

22. From 1998 onwards there has been a clear, albeit slow, shift in the Taliban's position on the access of women to health services. There are, for example, indications of a relaxation of their ban on employment of females in the health sector. In 1999, approximately 40 female medical students, who were forced to leave Kabul University before receiving their medical degrees, were allowed to continue their education. In the first quarter of 2000, the authorities in Kandahar agreed, after lengthy negotiations with WFP, WHO and the Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, to start a nursing school in Kandahar for 50 female and 50 male nurses. A similar school for female nurses is being negotiated for Jalalabad. WHO also implemented two courses of continuing medical education for 48 female doctors, nurses and midwives in 1998-1999. Since 1998, increasing numbers of female nurses, vaccinators and traditional birth attendants are being trained by the assistance community and are currently working in both rural and urban areas. The nursing school in Herat was reopened during the first quarter of 2000 through assistance from WHO and WFP. Two of the larger women's hospitals — Meerawis Hospital in Kandahar and Rabia Balki hospital in Kabul — have also been rehabilitated jointly with the assistance community. Furthermore, as reported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), female social mobilizers have played an important role in health education and enhancing awareness about safe water and sanitation, despite very arduous working conditions.

23. There has been a trend away from the centralized, vertical health care system towards a regionalized preventive and primary health care system that emphasizes curative medicine.[22] This change in approach can significantly benefit women and children, especially in a country where the supply base for curative medicine is very narrow for women. Measures have been taken, for example, in the area of reproductive health to reduce the high maternal mortality and morbidity rates in the country. UNICEF, WHO and NGOs, in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Health, have developed a Strategy

Framework for the Safe Motherhood Initiative with the objective of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity. The Safe Motherhood Initiative was launched in three provinces, Laghman and Logar in 1998, and Farah in 1999, and focuses on awareness raising and has capacity-building and training components. In 1999, the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, WHO and NGOs provided support to over 20 comprehensive obstetric care facilities to support traditional birth attendants and improve the maternal health programme. UNFPA has also developed emergency obstetric and reproductive health kits, which have been distributed in Afghanistan.[23] As reported by UNICEF and UNFPA, despite notable progress in sensitization, efforts in this field are hampered by the scarcity of implementing partners and qualified female staff as well as the various restrictions on the mobility of women.

24. Progress has been achieved in the area of immunization. UNICEF, WHO and a wide range of NGOs supported the National Immunization Days in May/June and in October/November 2000. During the spring round, approximately 5.3 million children under the age of five, both boys and girls, were vaccinated against polio, providing the highest coverage since 1994. UNICEF data show that there are no significant gender gaps in immunization coverage rates. This is largely a result of the participation of hundreds of Afghan female health staff in the various vaccination efforts, including the National Immunization Days. In spite of these measures, it is estimated that nearly 1,000 children died during the measles epidemic during the spring of 2000. These deaths could have been prevented if the children had been immunized or had had access to basic health services.

25. Recent reports have included information on the problem of the mental health of women in Afghanistan. Many women are traumatized by conflict and experience high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives. According to these reports, women, particularly in urban areas, display typical signs of trauma such as depression, anguish and chronic fatigue.[24] Severe depression has led some women to suicide. Furthermore, despite the lack of statistics on drug use among women, there is strong evidence that the number of drug-addicted females is increasing both in drug-producing provinces and other areas and in refugee camps. Women are using drugs as an alternative to medicine, but also for psychological reasons.[25] These reports indicate the importance of increasing efforts to address the mental and emotional effects of war.

B. Education

26. Women's equal access to education is key to improving the health, nutrition and education of the family as a whole, as well as to empowering women to participate more fully in the rehabilitation and development process. In Afghanistan, the education sector is characterized by limited human and financial resources, the absence of a national education policy and curricula at pre-university levels, and by the lack of resources and political will to rehabilitate school buildings and facilities destroyed by war. The situation of women and girls has been further aggravated by discriminatory policies that ban female students from all levels of education and that ban female teachers from working.

27. Education in Afghanistan today is provided to boys by religious and regular schools. In the Taliban-controlled areas, girls' access to education is available only through community and home-based schools established either by local communities or by the assistance community. Home- and community-based schools in both rural and urban areas function more as literacy centres than formal schools. The Badakhshan Province, controlled by the United Front, is currently the only location in the whole country where girls are studying up to the twelfth grade. NGOs such as the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Save the Children-USA and Care International, provide the majority of education services, in coordination with UNICEF and WFP. The principled position of the United Nations system on equality of access of girls and boys to education has been the guiding principle in United Nations negotiations at all levels with the Taliban authorities. However, despite strenuous efforts led by UNICEF, no significant progress in improving girls' access to equality in formal education has yet been achieved.

28. In Islamabad in November 1999, the World Bank organized a workshop on education in Afghanistan which was attended by a wide spectrum of assistance actors. Participants concluded that even within the current restrictive environment, opportunities existed for expanding the education base for Afghan children.[26] However, medium- and longer-term investment in

human and financial resources is urgently needed to address the enormous problems faced by the education sector.

29. According to UNHCR data, only 30 per cent of primary school age children in the refugee camps are attending schools. Education in refugee camps is more formalized and girls of school age have more access to education at all levels. There are no gender gaps in the enrolment rates for children who are educated in urban centres in Pakistan.

30. In cooperation with international NGOs such as the Swedish Afghanistan Committee for Afghanistan, Save the Children-USA, Care International mentioned above and others, UNICEF and UNDP provide literacy skills and education to girls and have, as noted above, achieved some progress in the provision of alternatives to formal education in some Taliban-controlled areas. It is estimated that 300,000 children receive informal education. Moreover, community-based schools for girls are on the increase in urban areas. In November 1999, 9 community girls' schools were established in Kandahar Province and 13 girls' schools were established in Kabul; all of these were financed by local communities in agreement with the Taliban authorities. The number of privately organized home-based schools also increased in the urban areas. Furthermore, the British Broadcasting Corporation has developed an education programme through radio (BBC Reach) as an innovative attempt to increase access to education in the country.

31. The brain drain from Afghanistan, combined with the collapse of the education system, constitutes one of the great challenges for the future rehabilitation of the country.[27]

C. Employment

32. The war has destroyed the formal economic sectors in the country. According to the 1997 World Bank report, the Afghan economy is currently reliant on subsistence agriculture, unofficial transit trade, war-related financial flows, drug income and international assistance. For women, agriculture, animal husbandry and small home-based crafts such as carpet weaving, tailoring, embroidery, soap making, candle making, poultry raising, honey production and bakery activities have provided the only opportunities for employment. The United Nations and the assistance community have been involved in projects creating this type of employment to provide women and their families with a subsistence income.

33. However, these types of employment have only a limited impact on the status of women, as they require basic skills and are poorly paid. Women have no access to markets, due to the Taliban's imposed restriction on their movement. This leads in many cases to women's exploitation by male middlemen, except where NGOs take the responsibility for the final marketing of their products.[28]

34. During 1999 and the first quarter of 2000, the assistance community managed to increase the number of women in the area of health. Women are employed as doctors, midwives, social mobilizers and community mobilizers. A number of female teachers have also been employed at community-based schools for girls. These types of employment were facilitated by indications that the Mahram Edict, issued by the Taliban in March 1998, banning women from travelling inside Afghanistan without being accompanied by a male relative, was being relaxed.

35. A major setback to the achieved improvements in women's employment came on 6 July 2000 when the Taliban's Council of Ministers banned Afghan women from working in "foreign organizations and NGOs". The ensuing negotiations between the United Nations and the Taliban authorities did not bring about change in the Taliban's position. On 17 July, a *firman* (law) was signed by the Taliban leadership confirming the 6 July edict, while making exceptions for women working in the health sector. The July law was not only a gross violation of the rights of Afghan women to employment but it also significantly constrained the aid community's access to the contributions of Afghan women. For example, on 16 August, the Taliban authorities forced WFP to close its 24 women's bakeries in Kabul. The bakeries were run by 360 women workers providing subsidized bread to 7,200 families, comprising over 42,000 people, predominantly women and children. The women and children benefiting from the programme were amongst the poorest and most vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

36. Further complicating the difficulties faced by United Nations agencies was the issuance of a revised "Statute on the Activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan" of 14 August 2000. These measures indicated that the authorities felt a strong need to

exercise more monitoring and control over the assistance community's programmes, especially those where women were involved.

37. Reacting to the laws, the assistance community joined me in expressing deep concern regarding the ban against women's employment with the assistance community, which exacerbated the discrimination and suffering of Afghan women and children and constituted a gross violation of the rights of Afghan women. On 18 August, the Taliban authorities decided to reopen the women's bakeries in Kabul.

38. Lasting more than 20 years, the conflict in Afghanistan has created a large number of widows. Currently, there are about 2 million war widows living inside Afghanistan who are the sole providers for their families. The majority of these widows are unemployed, unskilled and live well below poverty levels. In 1999, the Taliban authorities issued an edict allowing needy widows with no other means of support to seek employment in the health and social service sectors. However, the opportunities in these sectors are extremely limited and many recent reports have noted an increase in impoverished women who are reduced to begging to help them survive.[29] The plight of widows who cannot support themselves because they are not permitted to work or benefit from humanitarian assistance is cause for particularly deep concern within the assistance community.

39. Unemployment rates are extremely high in Afghanistan and the need to create income-generating employment cannot be exaggerated. This applies to all parts of the country, but is especially severe in urban areas. The recent Taliban reorganization downsized the public sector by 40 per cent and worsened urban poverty. Unemployment in Kabul alone has reached serious proportions, with approximately one quarter of all families surviving on United Nations-subsidized bread and many others on remittances from abroad. Several central ministries have been downsized — the Ministry of Higher Education by 6,000 employees and the Ministry of Education by 12,000. Female teachers who were no longer allowed to work but were still on the payroll have now lost their incomes. According to a recent study of the Afghan labour markets conducted by the WFP, people's purchasing power is down in all major Afghan cities. The Taliban's edicts banning women from working and limiting the access of United Nations and NGOs to the inputs of Afghan women continue to present formidable obstacles to designing and implementing humanitarian programmes.

D. Women's human rights

40. The continuing reports from observers monitoring Afghanistan indicate the gravity of the human rights situation in general, but especially of women and girls, and the need for urgent international action. The Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan in 1997 found that women in Afghanistan were unable to enjoy even the most basic rights under the 16 main articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Afghanistan is a signatory. Since then the situation has not improved. The Taliban authorities do not recognize the commitments made by previous Afghan regimes to the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments.

41. The restrictions by the Taliban have severely affected women's civil and political rights, freedom of movement, and freedom of assembly, as Afghan women are confined to the home. The right to personal security has been violated as a result of the civil war, but also by the arbitrary and summary beatings of women by members of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. There is, as expressed by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women at a briefing for the Security Council on 7 April 2000, a need to continue to press for the full enjoyment of the rights of women and children, not only for education, health and employment, but in all other areas.

42. War still continues to be the most significant factor preventing the enjoyment of human rights in Afghanistan. The right of civilians to be treated as non-combatants continues to be ignored, resulting in significant loss of life and human suffering. Summary executions and arbitrary detentions are known features of the conflict and still continue.[30] The socio-economic conditions which are both an outcome of the war and a contributing factor to it, constitute the biggest threat to the lives of Afghan children, women and men.[31] In this respect, restrictions that hamper women's possibilities to sustain themselves and their families are of great concern.

43. Gender differences and inequalities in Afghanistan's patriarchal society are deep-rooted and multifaceted. During previous years of conflict, prior to the arrival of the Taliban, the rights of Afghan women were also largely ignored. The debate following the Taliban take-over in 1996 and the imposition of a number of edicts restricting the rights of both women and men in Afghanistan has led to an increased awareness about the need for the Afghan people fully to enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms.[32]

44. Aid organizations report that work in non-Taliban areas is not much easier despite the greater official openness of the authorities. The focus on the Taliban-controlled areas has also, as noted in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of human rights with regard to women to the Commission on Human Rights Subcommission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,[33] led to a lack of reporting and information on the situation of women and girls in the territory controlled by the United Front. There is a need to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls who reside in these areas and whose situation is rarely considered.

IV. United Nations activities in the context of the principled approach

A. Development of a gender policy and coordinating mechanisms

45. To respond to the continued restrictions on women's human rights in Afghanistan a set of policy recommendations for a principle-centred approach to these violations was developed by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations in 1997. This approach was intended to enable continuation of life-sustaining assistance, that is, immediate survival and other humanitarian activities, while recognizing that selective disengagement of some United Nations agencies from some institutional assistance programmes may be required. The Inter-Agency Gender Mission translated these policy recommendations into practical operational guidelines and provided recommendations on their interpretation, taking into account the complex and quickly changing Afghan context. The policy recommendations and the findings of the Inter-Agency Gender Mission provided the basis for the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan established in 1998. The principles set forth in the Strategic Framework have since then guided the United Nations and its assistance partners in their activities.

46. Since coming to power, the Taliban authorities have regularly challenged United Nations principles. Particularly in mid-2000, the conditions under which assistance was provided to Afghans became more complex, in view of Taliban restrictions on women's employment and the new regulations limiting United Nations and NGO activities. In response, the United Nations has repeatedly made it clear to the authorities that discrimination on the basis of gender is unacceptable.

47. By applying the principled approach as far as possible combining gender equality, human rights and humanitarian aspects, during 1999 and the first half of 2000, the United Nations and the NGO assistance community have been able to bring about a number of positive developments in the areas of health, employment and education. This brought some hope for Afghan women's future, despite the bleak overall picture of the reality. This shift was also due to increased demand from local communities for health and education for girls and women and for income-generating employment for women, especially for war widows heading households. The United Nations and the assistance community have been instrumental in preparing the ground for this shift, through continued advocacy, principled engagement, and constructive dialogue and negotiation with the authorities.

48. The work of the Gender Adviser and the Human Rights Adviser, whose posts were recommended by the 1997 Gender Mission has been central in enhancing knowledge and awareness in this respect. They interact regularly with programme staff of United Nations agencies and NGOs and help to deepen understanding of how human rights and gender perspectives can be integrated in the programming process. They also helped to deepen understanding of the benefits of gender mainstreaming and empowering women, both among United Nations staff and Afghan officials and population. They provide valuable guidance to the NGO assistance community in their programme activities. Both gender equality and human rights action plans have been developed.

49. The necessary coordinating mechanisms of the aid community for gender mainstreaming and reaching out to Afghan women have been developed or

strengthened. Today, there are well-structured mechanisms such as thematic and working groups, including a Thematic Group on human rights, and Regional Coordinating Offices which facilitated the efforts of assistance actors to give concrete effect to the principle of non-discrimination. Furthermore, Regional Coordinating Bodies with the support of the Regional Coordinating Offices facilitate common programming initiatives at the regional level. With the assistance of the Regional Coordinating Offices, coordination arrangements are becoming more established and the limitations of access and capacity, constraints experienced through much of 1999, are being overcome. The Principled Common Programme for provision of assistance has, furthermore, facilitated the coordination of the activities of the United Nations and international and national NGOs. This programme addresses the priority needs required (a) to alleviate human suffering, (b) to protect and advance human rights, with special focus on women, (c) to provide minimum basic social services on a non-discriminatory basis, and (e) to ensure the return of refugees.

50. Reports from the field indicate that, by and large, there is no inherent gender discrimination in meeting the life-sustaining material needs of Afghans. The United Nations system in Afghanistan has furthermore established a number of monitoring mechanisms in order to review compliance with principles and guidelines, such as the Strategic Monitoring Unit, the weekly inter-agency senior staff meetings and the Gender Forum. Furthermore, the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Taliban authorities established the Joint Consultative Committee to discuss United Nations standards on human rights and gender equality and the right to health, education and women's employment opportunities. The Joint Consultative Committee discussions have, however, not proved highly effective in solving policy and programming problems, in part owing to a low level of representation by the Taliban and frequent shifts in the Taliban's positions and organization. Further efforts are still required to strengthen mechanisms such as the Joint Consultative Committee and the Gender Forum.

B. Advocacy and dialogue on gender issues

51. The importance of developing and enhancing dialogue with the authorities and affected communities on priority gender concerns was identified as a key objective by the assistance community in 1999.[34] The United Nations has followed a policy of constructive engagement consistent with agreed principles. Dialogue with the Taliban and the United Front authorities on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with a special focus on the rights of women, is an ongoing process. Individual agencies are actively engaged in advocacy and dissemination of information at the local and central levels on issues such as the rights of the disabled, children and women. UNICEF has, for example, held successful negotiations with the clergy to convince them of the importance of the Safe Motherhood Initiative.

52. The field visits by the Gender Adviser and her regular meetings with Taliban political leaders and heads of technical departments have been very helpful in establishing contacts with the Afghan authorities. Following the July Edict, a number of field missions were undertaken to discuss the implications of the latest ban on women's employment. Furthermore, in 1999 and 2000, the Gender Adviser engaged the Taliban authorities in a discussion of the commonalties between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Koran and other Islamic texts and practices.

53. The Secretary-General's Personal Representative as head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan has, in his negotiations with the authorities, repeatedly raised the issue of gender discrimination and human rights violations. He has focused, in particular, on reports of the dismissal of female civil servants from government service, as well as broader gender equality issues.[35] A few women professionals are now also on the staff of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. The former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, on her mission to Afghanistan in October 2000 emphasized the issue of suppression of women's rights as a serious concern to the international community and a hindrance to the return of female refugees driven from the country by years of civil war.

54. Following the July Edict and the "Statute on the Activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan" a United Nations/NGO task force was established to

study the implications of the edict and to identify policy recommendations. The Task Force concluded that it was particularly important that the international community find a way to respond to humanitarian needs while simultaneously pursuing an approach that gives concrete effect to principles. It is equally important that the aid community take a proactive and collaborative approach and speak with one voice on issues of principle. The concluding comments of the Task Force were made available to the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. The Executive Committee held two meetings, in New York on 7 November 2000 and at Geneva on 4 December 2000, discussing the implementation of the Secretary-General's June 1997 policy guidance on assistance to Afghanistan, especially with regard to the situation of women.

55. A wide range of NGOs, both national and international, as well as individual women and men, organized a series of advocacy campaigns expressing concerns about the denial of human rights of women and girls under the Taliban regime. In 2000, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights received a total of 9,171 petitions from 36 countries representing all continents of the world.

C. Efforts to involve Afghan women in assistance programmes and improve their status

56. As a result of better coordination and programming many more rehabilitation programmes are targeting women now than in 1996-1997. Although under the Taliban's laws women and men cannot always undertake the same activities, wherever possible men's activities are complemented by parallel women's projects, ensuring equal benefits in participation and results.

57. In Kandahar, UNCHS (Habitat) engages men in solid-waste collection and women in a complementary sanitation education campaign. UNDP has developed the P.E.A.C.E programme (Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment) which addresses poverty, food insecurity, lack of basic social and economic infrastructures, environmental devastation and governance problems. Women are specifically targeted in all aspects of the P.E.A.C.E programme and efforts continue among the United Nations agencies and NGOs implementing the UNDP-funded projects to engage more women. However, there is still a great deal of resistance, both cultural and political, to involving Afghan women at the different levels of the programme cycle. The P.E.A.C.E programme has shown that stable rural communities have more potential to demand services from the authorities, including girls' education than in the past.

58. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)/Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation programme (ARRP) aims at fostering community participation, improving living conditions and human welfare for rural community members, in particular women, and promoting greater access to productive assets and income-earning opportunities. The programme is implemented through skills development and community-managed micro-credit schemes. Whenever possible, UNOPS/ARRP aims at organizing separate women's development committees, in an attempt to ensure that women are involved in planning and implementation of infrastructure projects. UNOPS/ARRP interventions under rural credit and income-generation activities have mostly targeted women.

59. Under its community development programme, Habitat is developing "Community Forums" across urban Afghanistan, emphasizing a participatory decision-making process. To date, out of 60 Forums, 24 are completely run and managed by women. It is planned that this number will increase. In addition, a variety of health and education activities are under way under the umbrella of these forums. On average these benefit more females than males.

60. FAO has also specifically addressed the needs of women, for example, through its livestock initiators programme. Activities within this programme have included the training of 302 women in different animal health and animal husbandry packages, and the provision of veterinary services to village women through four veterinary sub-clinics. A three-week refresher training course was held for livestock initiators in Peshawar. Assistance has focused on the development of livestock assets under the control of women through separate veterinary clinics with appropriate location for easy access by women. Participation in the training programmes was facilitated through culturally acceptable resource persons.

61. UNICEF has provided support to internally displaced persons that is specifically targeted to children and women. In Panjshir in 1999, UNICEF encouraged the involvement of female internally displaced persons in planning and implementation of projects. UNICEF staff have made regular field visits, insisting on meeting with women and visiting projects for girls and women, and have made relevant recommendations. UNICEF has also insisted that drought relief assistance reach women, girls and boys.

62. Under the umbrella of its parallel programmes Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations and Emergency Operation for Drought Victims, WFP's food assistance has reached a total of 2,650,122 of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people. Of this number, 826,838 are women and 1,060,048 are children, which represents 72 per cent of the total number of vulnerable beneficiaries reached by WFP. Women food aid monitors have carried out intensive monitoring of some of the WFP food assisted projects in urban areas in order to ensure that women and children have access to and benefit from WFP food supplies. Furthermore, to the extent possible, WFP seeks to build mother and child health clinics, girl's schools and maternity wards, which largely or exclusively benefit females. In July and November 2000, WFP organized two workshops for its gender focal points in order to elaborate on a strategy to reach more female beneficiaries.

63. A number of NGO projects have also, as mentioned above, specifically targeted female beneficiaries, through, for example, education projects, health information and income-generating activities, which provide an invaluable support and complement to the related United Nations efforts. The involvement of women in programme activities offered by the United Nations and the assistance community has been severely limited by the Taliban's restrictions on women's employment and mobility.

D. Awareness raising and promotion of women's human rights

64. United Nations agencies and NGOs conduct training courses on the rights of children, women and refugees. UNICEF has, for example, trained over 3,000 persons on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in six regions of Afghanistan, both Taliban and non-Taliban controlled, and supported awareness-raising activities on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Internal capacity-building on the rights-based approach to programming has also continued and additional gender training for staff is being planned. UNICEF plans to carry out training on children's and women's development issues for journalists and provide support to the only remaining television network in the country in Badakhshan. UNFPA, in cooperation with the BBC Afghan Education Project, contributes to the increased understanding of women's reproductive rights and dissemination of health information.

65. A comprehensive human rights training programme for aid workers covered by both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has been developed and launched in May 2000. Although the related funds have now been received, slow availability and disbursement of funds delayed the pace of the training. Additional resources will help to ensure that the current momentum is maintained.[36] The Gender Adviser has also initiated a series of gender training workshops for United Nations staff. Gender training workshops for UNDCP and WFP programming staff were, for example, implemented during June and July 1999.

66. The observation of special days, such as International Women's Day and International Day for Disabled Children have contributed greatly to raising awareness of women's human rights. On 8 March 2000, for the very first time during the Taliban rule, a formal public celebration of International Women's Day was held in Kabul. Seven hundred women of all ages, including former university professors, engineers, teachers, doctors, nurses and school principals attended the celebration. Ten of them were honoured with prizes from the organizers of the celebration, namely the United Nations system working in close collaboration with the Taliban authorities. A representative of the supreme leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Omar, made a statement at the celebration. Radio Shariah, the official Taliban radio station, covered the event and permission was granted to a wide cross-section of international media to attend the event and conduct random interviews with the women present. At the end of the celebration, it was announced that six women prisoners would be released in celebration of the Day.

E. Safety and mobility of staff

67. Security concerns continue to be a major cause of constraint in the provision of humanitarian assistance and in accessing Afghan women. The unstable political environment and ongoing conflict make delivery of assistance very difficult and sometimes dangerous. The murder of seven Afghan workers from the United Nations-supported mine awareness programme by an unidentified armed band in western Afghanistan earlier last year illustrates the everyday risks taken by humanitarian personnel.[37]

68. Moreover, in an environment where only female employees have access to Afghan women, the importance of the full removal of all restrictions on female employment and freedom of movement cannot be understated. The question of free and unhindered access for United Nations programmes and personnel to all populations in need, including the most vulnerable, such as female-headed households, the elderly, disabled individuals, children, marginalized groups and minorities, including refugees, has been one of the priority areas in discussions with the authorities during 1999-2000. All United Nations agencies strongly advocate the safety and mobility of female staff.

69. Although the supplementary protocol on security concluded with the Taliban in March 1999 still remains as the framework for ensuring that agencies are allowed to work effectively in full security, problems remain with its implementation. Following the July edict, minimal United Nations humanitarian operational requirements have been developed. Discussions are under way with the Taliban authorities to secure their agreement. Security of United Nations and NGO staff is held hostage to the general political environment, including the impact of possible outside interventions over which aid agency staff have no control, e.g., missile strikes, sanctions, etc. Security concerns are an inhibiting factor in terms of being able to maintain an adequate presence and ensure timely programme implementation.

F. Recruitment and placement of women

70. The rigid division of gender roles in Afghanistan creates a situation where access to Afghan women can be achieved only through female international and national staff. Employment of women by United Nations agencies is therefore a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of all programmes addressing the needs of the female population.

71. Although some agencies, such as WFP and UNICEF, have made strong efforts to improve the gender balance of both their international and national professional staff, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution was not achieved. Furthermore, all incumbents heading United Nations agencies in Afghanistan are still occupied by male professionals, as was the case in 1997.

G. Availability and distribution of resources

72. Funding is a fundamental constraint in meeting the humanitarian needs of Afghans, women as well as men. The assistance community has reported on the difficulties in finding sufficient resources to carry out its programmes. The Secretary-General noted in a recent report that the significant lack of resources often means that humanitarian agencies cannot respond to "brutal, life-threatening needs", and he appealed to donors "to respond generously to requests for support".[38] Of the $221 million requested at the beginning of 2000, donors have contributed $107 million, or 48 per cent.[39] Reports of diminishing international assistance due to donor fatigue are therefore alarming, e.g., for refugees, mine-clearance and drug programmes.

73. The assistance community has been providing Afghanistan with approximately $200 million annually in the last decade. Most of this assistance has been allocated to short-term humanitarian and emergency programmes. As a result, international assistance addresses human suffering and provides deterrents to major humanitarian disasters, but it does not allow for sustainable medium-term interventions that create an enabling environment for the rehabilitation of the country's social and production sectors, thereby improving the situation of women.[40]

H. Generation and dissemination of data and knowledge

74. There is a noticeable paucity of reporting and documentation regarding lessons learned and best practices at the programme level. There are few

surveys to assess project impact of programmes targeting women, for example, at the village, province or regional level. Furthermore, the monitoring and impact assessment components, if included at all in project proposals, are usually the weakest components of these proposals. UNICEF has pointed out that there is the need for an assessment of the gender aspects of the drought affecting the country. There is also a need for United Nations agency-specific training plans to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment competencies in programming, including gender-related monitoring and impact assessment competencies.

75. The establishment of an independent Strategic Monitoring Unit to provide indicators and baseline data against which to measure progress on issues of principle, including the assistance community's capacity to address the needs of the most vulnerable, is therefore a welcome development. Population figures have also been increasingly disaggregated in order more clearly to identify and target women and other vulnerable groups.[41] There is also increased coordination on public information and publications.

76. A revised set of gender mainstreaming indicators, based on the guidelines prepared by the 1997 Inter-Agency Gender Mission, is being prepared by the United Nations Gender Adviser and will be distributed at the end of January 2001 for review and approval by United Nations agencies. It is anticipated that this set of indicators will enhance the existing monitoring mechanism for follow up and evaluation.

V. Concluding remarks

77. With no peace in sight, and socio-economic conditions deteriorating — to the point where they are threatening the very survival of the Afghan people — particularly as a result of the drought, the collapsed health care and education systems and a lack of governance, Afghanistan is nearing a humanitarian disaster. Women are particularly vulnerable due to their social status in Afghan society, which historically has been characterized by conservative cultural norms and traditions and a strong division of gender roles. With the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 1996, gender discrimination became institutionalized by the authorities through the issuance of a number of edicts placing severe restrictions on women's freedom of movement, association and participation in public life. Women's access to education, health, employment and public life was severely curtailed. These edicts, in particular the Taliban's ban on employment of women, not only violate women's human rights but also present formidable obstacles for humanitarian efforts by the United Nations and the assistance community to improve the status of women and girls. Despite some intermittent changes, there has been no marked improvement in the overall situation of Afghan women since the visit of the Inter-Agency Gender Mission in 1997. In fact, it has worsened.

78. The overall situation of women, therefore, remains unacceptable and requires the sustained attention of the international community. As stated in the Afghanistan Appeal 2001, while the world has acknowledged the need for life-saving assistance, it seems unwilling to acknowledge Afghans' — and especially women's and girls' — dire need for health care, water, sanitation, education, productive employment and the realization of their human rights. Support is urgently needed for assistance programmes that not only sustain lives but also provide the hope of a future worth living.[42] There is a need for a medium-term involvement of the United Nations and the assistance community to facilitate capacity-building in local communities. Tangible progress in the advancement of women cannot be achieved through short-term, crisis deterrent programming. Moreover, not only is the current short-term financing not sufficient to meet Afghan women's needs, it does not allow for strategic planning or longer-term programming to address gender discrimination in the country.

79. The efforts of the United Nations and the aid community to improve programming, strengthen coordination and monitor mechanisms have contributed to some extent to the achievement of a principled approach on a more harmonious and united basis. All humanitarian actors increasingly realize the importance of involving Afghan women and girls in their programmes as a precondition for their success. A number of mechanisms are in place to link gender policy to concrete actions and a set of gender indicators is being developed. A monitoring mechanism has been set up to oversee compliance with the gender policy and gender strategy, in particular to identify inconsistencies between the gender policies of the agencies and the implementation of those policies in operational fieldwork. Agencies are better aware of

gender issues and are attuned to gender discrimination and human rights abuses. A number of innovative approaches have been adopted, including possibilities for women's employment offered through the Afghan extended family, complementing men's activities by parallel women's projects and the regionalization of women's projects. Agencies and NGOs are increasingly involved in advocacy with regard to gender equality problems. As a result, there is no gender discrimination in the provision by the United Nations of life-saving assistance to Afghan women and men. Moreover, some improvement in the status of Afghan women has been realized, in particular, in access to health and education. While not a holistic solution, this progress provides a basis for change. Yet much remains to be done.

80. The constraints related to incorporating international standards for the treatment of women and girls into the provision of international assistance to Afghanistan have yet to be addressed. Implementation of the principle-centred approach to gender equality issues in Afghanistan, consistent with the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, continues to be hindered not only by the policies of the authorities, but also by differences within the aid community. One of the lessons learned is that a deeper understanding of Afghanistan and the cultural, social and economic context of the country should be the basis for gender-related interventions. Given flagrant disregard for women's human rights by the Afghan authorities in the context of extreme poverty and deprivation, United Nations agencies and the assistance community still face the challenge of achieving consensus on how to resolve the tensions between promoting gender equality and protecting human rights on the one hand, and saving lives by providing for basic human needs on the other. While widely accepted by the United Nations, the donor community and most NGOs, the pragmatic approach proposed by the Inter-Agency Mission in 1997, which holds that the right to life must be secured while simultaneously tackling the deep-rooted discrimination against women, is yet to be operationalized. In particular, the United Nations, NGOs and donors should collectively define a clear operational "bottom line" position to react to further flagrant violations which challenge international human rights and gender equality principles to the point where any further humanitarian cooperation would become impossible.

81. While clearly demonstrating its firm determination to uphold its principles, the United Nations makes efforts to expand dialogue with the Taliban and set the stage for potentially better communication with the authorities with the expressed goal of improving the situation of women and girls. Such continuing dialogue with the Afghan authorities, in which the international community speaks with one voice, is required to stress the urgent need to adhere to internationally accepted norms and standards. The Taliban, motivated by a strong desire for international recognition, is not insensitive to how it is perceived within Afghan society and by the outside world. The United Nations system and the assistance community should find ways and means to facilitate continuous dialogue on human rights and gender equality issues with the political and religious leaders within the Taliban movement. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop culture-sensitive programmes to sensitize Afghan officials, ministry staff and technical departments on international principles of human rights and gender equality.

82. The 1997 Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan highlighted the critical role of women international staff in effective implementation of United Nations programmes since women staff provide vital and often unique links to the community in general, and to Afghan women and girls in particular. Despite efforts made by United Nations agencies to hire more women, the overall goal of 50/50 distribution of women and men staff set by the General Assembly has not been achieved. Efforts to employ more qualified women, especially at the decision-making level should be intensified. Security and limited mobility concerns continue to create major constraints for the provision of assistance. Without the full removal of all restrictions on the employment and freedom of movement of Afghan women, it will remain impossible to reach or even communicate with the thousands of women in extreme need of assistance.

83. Bringing the Afghan war to an end and averting an approaching humanitarian catastrophe will, without doubt, be the most important policy issues facing the international community. The quest for peace, development and gender equality in Afghanistan, which will be both long and difficult, requires a comprehensive strategy on the part of the international community to bring about a lasting solution. The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to keep

the issue of the status of Afghan women and girls under review in order to oversee the efforts by the United Nations and the assistance community to empower Afghan women, politically and economically, to contribute on an equal footing in peace-building and the rehabilitation of the country.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan, 12-24 November 1997 (see WomenWatch web site: www.un.org.womenwatch/news/archive.htm).

[2] Organizations of the United Nations system which provided their inputs for this report are as follows: FAO, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, WFP, UNCHS (Habitat) and UNDP.

[3] Press Release SC/6816 of 8 March 2000.

[4] S/PRST/2000/12 statement by the President of the Security Council.

[5] See, for example, E/CN.4/1999/40 (March 1999), A/54/422 (September 1999), E/CN.4/2000/33 (January 2000), A/55/346 (August 2000).

[6] William Maley, "Women and Public Policy in Afghanistan: A comment", in *World Development 24*, No. 1, 1996:203-206.

[7] Referred to in the report of the Office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, "Vulnerability and humanitarian implications of United Nations Security Council sanctions in Afghanistan", December 2000.

[8] See: A/54/791-S/2000/205 (10 March 2000), A/54/918-S/2000/581 (16 June 2000), A/55/393-S/2000/875 (18 September 2000), A/55/633-S/2000/1106 (20 November 2000).

[9] See, for example, the report of the Office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, "Vulnerability and humanitarian implications of United Nations sanctions in Afghanistan", December 2000.

[10] See UNDP, *Human Development Report 2000*.

[11] See: Julie A. Mertus, *War's Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (Kumarian Press, West Hartford, CT, 2000). "Afghanistan: Women survivors of war under the Taliban", by Judy A. Benjamin.

[12] Afghanistan 2001 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal.

[13] Report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action, A/55/542, 3 November 2000, para. 59.

[14] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/55/633-S/2000/1106, para. 68.

[15] *Afghanistan Outlook* report of the Office of the United Nations Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, April 1999.

[16] UNDP, report prepared by Paula R. Newburg, "Principles, capacity-building, and gender in Afghanistan" (1 May 1998).

[17] See report of the Office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, "Vulnerability and humanitarian .... ".

[18] See *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.K/WWW/16).

[19] Afghanistan 2001 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal.

[20] Report prepared by the United Nations Gender Adviser in Afghanistan, "Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan", September 2000.

[21] See *The World's Women 2000*.

[22] See note 20.

[23] UNFPA, *The State of World Population 2000: Lives Together, Worlds Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change*.

[24] See for example: report by Physicians for Human Rights, "The Taliban's war on women: a health and human rights crisis in Afghanistan" 1998, and report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, mission to Pakistan and Afghanistan, 1-13 September 1999 (E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.4), para. 27.

[25] See note 20.

[26] The United Nations Gender Adviser in Afghanistan, "The situation of women's health, education and income-generating employment in Afghanistan: a gender perspective", report prepared for Afghanistan Support Group Meeting, Ottawa, 8-9 December 1999.

[27] Report of the Secretary-General, "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", A/55/348, 31 August 2000, para. 83.

[28] See note 20.

[29] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/54/791-S/2000/205, 10 March 2000, para. 45.

[30] Afghanistan 2001 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal.

[31] Afghanistan Support Group Meeting, Stockholm, 21-22 June 1999, background paper prepared by the United Nations Coordinator's Office.

[32] See, for example, *War's Offensive on Women*, "Afghanistan".

[33] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/18, para. 51.

[34] Afghanistan 2000 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal, Mid-Term Review.

[35] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/54/918-S/2000/581, 16 June 2000, para. 7.

[36] See note 34.

[37] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/55/393-S/2000/875, 18 September 2000, para. 9.

[38] Ibid., paras. 38 and 52.

[39] See note 30.

[40] See note 20.

[41] Afghanistan Support Group Meeting, Ottawa 8-9 December 1999, background paper prepared by the United Nations Coordinator's Office on Principled Common Programming.

[42] See note 30.